

Q1

Please provide your name:

Bill Wielechowski

Q2

Which office and district are you running for?

Alaska State Senate - District K

Q3

What is your vision for Alaska when it comes to reducing sexual assault and domestic violence? What steps are you prepared to take to get there?

Alaska is experiencing unacceptably high rates of domestic violence. While serving as a senator in the Alaska Legislature we've heard testimony from experts in committee hearings that rates of domestic violence have been increasing substantially for uncertain reasons. In 2019 Alaska reported domestic violence and sexual assault rates together as high as 59%, representing the highest rate of any state and highest domestic homicides per capita.

Alaska needs a multifaceted approach to eliminating domestic violence and sexual assault. First, we need to take the problem seriously, immediately, and not dismiss it or hope it will go away on its own. We need to pinpoint the roots of the problem so we can effectively address the factors leading to them. For domestic violence, the response must include: Resources for crisis intervention, addressing safe housing needs, victim advocacy, education for victims on learning to overcome shame and to seek the help they need to be safe at any given time, appropriate punishment, but also education for abusers to re-train their reactions to end the violence and inhibit future escalation, and early education aimed at young people. Children who observe or experience domestic violence by adults in the household could learn the same behavior or accept it in their own lives as adults, perpetuating the damaging cycle. We need to ensure that victims of sexual assault, including by an intimate partner or person known or unknown to them, report the crime—and never feel too embarrassed, ashamed, or worried they will not be believed. Devoting resources to the criminal justice effort and law enforcement, including specialized training is also a necessary part of the solution.

Q4

What responsibilities do you believe the Legislature and other elected officials hold in advancing efforts to intervene in and ultimately eliminate domestic violence and sexual assault in the state?

The lawmaking branch can propose, advance, and vet changes to law and help shape programs that address the domestic violence and sexual assault problem in Alaska. The legislature also has a responsibility to ensure the state's response to the problem is adequate. This includes appropriating funds to departments, programs, services, and assisting nonprofit organizations focused on eliminating domestic violence and sexual assault. I always support measures that ensure the maximum availability of tools and resources for programs and organizations where the goal is eliminating partner violence and sexual assault. Among recent legislative enactments, I was a strong proponent of Bree's Law as well as a measure to address the abysmal backlog of rape kit testing, and just last session I supported extension of

the State's Council on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault and co-sponsored HB 325, which fixed flaws in our statutes dealing with the definition of consent, domestic violence, and sex offender registry.

The legislature needs help from the subject matter experts to address these issues. Legislators must be educated by the people who work day-to-day helping victims and survivors and learning of the stories and patterns firsthand. I appreciate the tremendous work of ANDVSA and other organizations and individuals fighting to end partner violence and sexual assault in Alaska. I encourage professionals working in these fields to continue to testify and provide presentations in legislative hearings, publish informational resources, and set office appointments with us to share proposals that can help us decide on appropriate response measures to end domestic violence and sexual assault in Alaska.

Q5

Victim/Survivor services in Alaska have been flat funded for many years and are facing a potential shortfall in future years due to decreasing federal funds. What are your thoughts on state funding to provide support services for victims of domestic and sexual violence?

The State must supply funding as necessary where federal dollars are decreasing. I will continue to support dedicating state resources to victim and survivor assistance.

Q6

Alaska Native women are disproportionately affected by domestic violence and sexual assault. What are your thoughts on supporting Alaska tribes' ability to strengthen local responses for survivors?

The State must work with tribes and regional nonprofit organizations to ensure that culturally appropriate services are available to victims and survivors across the state.

Q7

Children are a particularly vulnerable population and may be traumatized by living with an abusive person and witnessing violence perpetrated against a parent or caretaker. What remedies might you suggest to provide protection for these children?

Adverse childhood experiences like witnessing domestic violence can have severely damaging effects on children, stemming from present disruption and instability at home to emotional trauma and repeating learned conduct in the long run in adulthood. Countering the effects of ACEs on these children should be addressed through an array of resources including specialized advocacy for the children, providing for physical wellbeing and shelter along with the affected parent, professional counseling, and educational programs to help the child adopt healthy lifestyle behaviors and achieve healthy relationships.

Q8

What is your opinion about an adult over the age of 30 having sex with someone that is only 16 or 17. Should it be a crime?

Yes

Q9

Do you believe reproductive rights should be the choice of an individual? If you do not, do you believe there should be choice for victims of incest, sexual and/or domestic violence?

A woman's right to privacy in her personal medical decisions is the law in Alaska pursuant to the Alaska Constitution and should remain that way.

#### Q10

The state of Alaska is experiencing a housing shortage statewide. This is impacting domestic and sexual violence survivors' ability to move forward with their lives. What would be your ideas to address this?

This is a difficult issue, as I know that affordable housing is often a consideration for many victims when deciding to leave their partners who may be risking their safety on any given day, yet there is no easy solution to a statewide housing shortage. Domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness for women and children. With options getting more limited, the risks to these victims and their children become more grave. I would support funding for capital projects to provide either new or added shelter space, as well as funding for needs-based grants to victims for safe housing on an emergency basis, which could include temporary transitional housing or even short-term shelter as may be necessary on an immediate basis.

#### Q11

Currently, the domestic violence response is largely a criminal justice response. Please share any ideas you have of other types of responses.

I believe the criminal justice response is one necessary facet related to deterrence for domestic violence offenses, for individuals who may otherwise repeat conduct and for the community at large. We must provide the tools on the justice side—including enacting appropriate criminal laws and providing an adequate law enforcement presence and prosecutorial efforts. But the problem is complicated and requires more than the criminal response. I think strong victim and survivor advocacy, support services, short-term and transitional safe housing options and individualized plans, educational efforts for victims, and rehabilitative programs for offenders, should all be inclusive of the approach to prevention of domestic violence, and these items also deserve the attention of the legislature as well as adequate funding.

#### Q12

Currently there is no dedicated funding for programs to provide services to engage individuals who have abused their families. What would be your ideas to address how to provide services to people who choose to cause harm to their partners? Do you feel this is the responsibility of the government?

The legislature has a constitutional duty to provide for the promotion and protection of public health and for the public welfare. Where government can potentially intercept an abuser's behavior and actions toward a domestic partner—preventing further instances or future escalation—this would provide greater protection to the victim and family, and it would necessarily be within the purview of government to

examine and implement appropriate means of doing so. Offenders processed through the criminal justice system who will be expected to live productively in society should participate in mandatory or court-ordered educational programs and/or individualized or group counseling to learn to manage their physical responses and reactions to anger and stress in the home. I would support funding for those services and welcome other proposals directed at intervention and rehabilitation of offenders who could benefit by changing their conduct before destroying their family and their futures and harming their communities.

### Q13

Are you familiar with local programs that provide domestic violence and sexual assault services to victims across Alaska? Have you recently visited your local domestic violence/sexual assault shelter or victim services program? What is your plan to support these programs?

As a senator serving since 2007, I have learned a lot about state programs aimed at victim and survivor support and services and about the nonprofit organizations addressing these issues throughout the state. In the past I have visited local shelters and I would be grateful for the opportunity to again visit a shelter and/or victim services program to give me greater insight and help me better understand the concerns and challenges confronting these support places and programs. I will continue to support legislation and funding to empower these groups and enable advocacy programs and victim services and to fight domestic violence and sexual assault so long as there is a need in the state of Alaska.